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ABSTRACT

This report explores background variables related to preschool teaching, and emphasizes that statistics fluctuate in early childhood education. The increase for preprimary enrollment of 3- and 4-year-olds was 26 percent from 1966 to 1967. Accurate figures on preschool teaching personnel are not available, but a large proportion of Head Start teachers had less than 6 months experience with young children before employment. However, one third of Head Start professional staff and almost two thirds of program assistants were drawn from minority groups. Certification and credentialing vary widely from state to state. Nursery school teachers are required to hold certificates in only 19 states, although preschool programs receiving federal funds must hire teachers with training or ability in child care. Teacher training programs in colleges reflect inadequate credentialing regulations. The present growth rate suggests double enrollment of preschool children by 1972. It is concluded that the critical shortage of trained preschool personnel will continue to grow. (DR)

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STAFFING PRESCHOOLS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION*

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Based on a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Chicago, Illinois
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STAFFING PRESCHOOLS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This report is part of a larger effort to summarize and evaluate research on teachers in preschool settings being conducted at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois. The first step in the effort to examine background variables related to teaching in preschools was to describe, as fully as possible, the scope and extent of the preschool enterprise. It soon became evident that such facts as the number of children enrolled in preschool classes of various types and the number of people engaged in teaching them are both fluctuating and elusive. The fluctuations reflect the dramatic growth the field has experienced in recent years; the elusiveness derives from several sources.

One such source is the variety of terms applied to educational groupings for young children. The term "early childhood education" is currently enjoying great popularity. Generally the term includes educational groups for children under and including eight years of age. The term "preschool" sometimes encompasses kindergartens or nursery schools for children of kindergarten age. The age range included in "preprimary" classes may or may not include kindergarten, as well as four- and three-year-olds. Equally unspecific is the term "day care center" as a descriptor of age range served. Day care centers usually include three- to five-year-olds, and in addition, provide after school care for elementary school children. Head Start classes may include children from three years up to the point of entry into the first grade, depending primarily on the local variations affecting Head Start centers. Similarly, "nursery school" may be applied to a wider age range, perhaps from two- to five-year-olds. Such lack of convention in the use of terms by which to describe early educational groupings introduces considerable difficulty into the tasks of describing the populations being served and of identifying staffing trends and practices.

Furthermore, this variety of terms is associated with great diversity in types of settings as well as their regulatory agencies. The basic parameters involved in this picture are types of sponsorship, clientele characteristics, length of day, and the age range served. A crude listing of types of nurseries or preschools would include:

nursery schools (public and private)
day care centers (public and private)
parochial preschools
Montessori schools (private)
parent cooperative nursery schools
adult and senior high school "child observation" classes

Head Start Child Development Centers
compensatory preschools (federal-, state-, or foundation-sponsored)
preschools associated with research and demonstration projects
university laboratory schools
nursery schools for exceptional children
recreation centers or community center preschools

The various types of schools, whether they are publicly, privately, or jointly supported, may be under the jurisdiction of a variety of public agencies within a given state or region. The following list of state or regional departments are examples:

departments of social welfare
departments of public instruction
departments of compensatory education
special services divisions of other departments
departments of migratory labor
departments of recreation
departments on urban affairs
human resources commissions
departments of labor and industrial relations
Regional Office of Economic Opportunity Community Action Programs

All of the authority units may be responsible for supervising and regulating educational groupings for young children in any given state or region. In the face of such confusion, a detailed description of the scope and extent of the preschool enterprise is not yet available.

The most recent U. S. Office of Education statistics obtained report the preprimary enrollment for October, 1967 (Gertler, 1968). According to this report, 3,868,000 children were enrolled in preprimary classes in 1967, compared with 3,187,000 for the previous year. The enrollment of three- and four-year-olds in 1966 was 906,000 and in 1967 was 1,145,000, indicating an increase of about 26% per year for that age group. (See also Schloss, 1967)

In its third annual report, the Office of Economic Opportunity indicated that for the fiscal year of 1967, 215,000 children participated in full year Head Start programs, and since the program began in 1965, a total of 2.2 million preschool children have attended Head Start classes (OEO, 1968).

Background Information on Teachers

Descriptive background information about teachers is even more resistant to discovery than enrollment figures. The two major national organizations whose activities are directed to teachers of young children, the Association for Childhood Education International, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children make no requests of their members for personal background information.

The research division of the National Education Association surveyed 12,000 school systems concerning their offering of nursery school education for 1966-67. The survey revealed that in the 1.2% of the sample which did offer such nursery programs, the large majority of teachers employed had the appropriate degrees and credentials (NEA, 1968). Since the sample was limited only to public school districts, the findings are unrepresentative of the majority of preschool teachers' training and qualifications.

An unpublished report made available by the Office of Economic Opportunity provides the only existing nationwide picture of Head Start personnel (OEO, n.d.). The report indicates that since 1965, an increasing proportion of all staff members of Head Start have had no college education. This trend reflects the increase in the employment of paraprofessionals in Head Start centers. Selected characteristics of professional and assistant personnel for the full year Head Start programs in the year 1967 are presented in Table 1. Because all professional staff member data are reported together, it is not possible to identify clearly the specific characteristics of teachers. Similarly, all program assistants' data are grouped so that characteristics of the assistant teachers or teacher aides cannot be further specified.

It comes as no surprise that such a large proportion of the Head Start staff (56% for professionals, and 76% for program assistants) had less than 6 months experience with young children before Head Start employment. On the positive side, it is interesting to note that more than a third of the Head Start professional staff members and almost two thirds of the program assistants were drawn from minority groups.

Credentials and Certification

Answering questions pertaining to certification and credentialing patterns of preschool personnel is made difficult by the startling variety of regional and local patterns of child care regulations. In some states, teachers are required to hold state-issued certificates. In others, the state issues licenses "to own and operate" a child care facility and stipulates some minimum teacher qualifications with the license. This "own and operate" license is usually accompanied by a manual which spells out minimum as well as optimum qualifications for teachers.

Typically, directors of day care facilities and nursery schools, are expected to have some post-high school education and some professional experience, while teachers often need no more than a couple of years of experience, high school diplomas, and the capacity to impress licensors with their genuine liking for children. In a few states, certified teachers in day care centers are obliged to commit themselves to participating in adult education or college extension courses in child growth and development.

Table 1

Table Showing Selected Characteristics of Head Start Staff for Full Year Program, 1967[1]

Staff Characteristics	Professional Staff*	Program Assistants**
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	53.4%	30.6%
Negro	31.6%	45.1%
American Indian	3.9%	8.0%
Puerto Rican	5.2%	5.1%
Mexican-American	2.3%	6.7%
Other	4.3%	4.5%
School years completed		
less than high school	5.5%	30.2%
high school	10.5%	50.8%
1 to 2 years college	13.7%	11.6%
3 to 4 years college	45.5%	5.9%
5 or more years college	23.8%	1.3%
not reported	1.4%	.7%
Paid experience with preschool children before Head Start		
none to less than 6 months	55.9%	75.8%
6 months to 3 years	22.4%	12.3%
4 to 5 years	4.7%	1.9%
over 5 years	13.6%	4.0%
not reported	3.7%	6.3%
Paid experience with poor children before Head Start		
none to less than 6 months	53.7%	76.2%
6 months to 3 years	23.7%	11.6%
4 to 5 years	4.7%	1.4%
over 5 years	12.9%	2.3%
not reported	5.2%	8.7%

[1] Project Head Start 1965-1967: A Descriptive Report of Programs and Participants.
*Teachers constitute 72.1% of the total professional staff surveyed.
**Teacher aides constitute 79.2% of the total program assistant staff surveyed.

A survey of teacher certification requirements in the 50 states reports that nursery school teachers are required by state law to hold certificates in only 19 states (Stinnet, 1967). Because of the multiplicity of types of preschools and regulatory agencies, many persons teaching young children are not governed by the state laws, even in those 19 states where such laws exist.

One encouraging development in the field is the establishment of a Federal Panel on Early Childhood Education in 1968, to guide the development of preschool and day care programs supported wholly or partially by federal funds. Panel membership is made up of representatives of the Department of Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health, Education, and Welfare, and the Office of Economic Opportunity (see Berson, 1968).

Interagency requirements for teachers generated by the Federal Panel are:

> (1) Educational activities (in day care facilities) must be under the supervision and direction of a staff member trained or experienced in child growth and development...
> (2) Persons providing direct care for children in the facility must have had training or demonstrated ability in working with children (Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements, 1968. p. 9)

These standards are representative of current practices in most states. They might be described as rudimentary standards, reflecting at least four points of strain in the field:

> (1) the obvious shortage of people with training in preschool education
> (2) the pressure to involve the poor in staffing preschool programs
> (3) the critical shortage of training personnel and institutions
> (4) the need for flexibility in hiring practices

The role of teacher training institutions in upgrading the level and quality of preschool personnel is complicated by the lack of adequate credentialing regulations. Colleges are unwilling to invest resources in teacher training programs which offer no terminal credential or certificate which in turn would assure a candidate a certified teaching position. A recent survey of early childhood education training programs was made by the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI, 67-68). The survey showed that from almost 150 responding institutions of higher learning, nearly half indicated that they had an under-graduate teacher education program designed specifically for early childhood

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education, and that just over a quarter of them had such a program for graduate students. No information is available on the sampling strategy employed in the survey. As of this writing, the findings are incomplete, as well as out of date.

Another survey conducted by the Association for Childhood Education International describes in some detail a number of characteristics described as "exemplary" early childhood teacher education programs. The exemplary features of ten such high quality programs are highlighted as guidelines for program planners. In general they reflect traditional practices of offering a variety of relevant courses and practica. (Howard, 1968)

Summary

An overview of such background information as we have been able to obtain suggests few reliable generalizations. In terms of numbers, the present observed rate of growth in enrollment suggests that the number of children enrolled in preschool classes can be expected to double present figures by 1972. Estimates of future staffing needs can be only very rough at this time. One statement appearing in the literature proposes that "two and a half million" early childhood educators will be needed in the next ten years (Southern Education Foundation, 1967). An inspection of the enrollment data available suggests that at their current rate of increase, we can expect that in 1970 there will be about 160,000 persons teaching three- and four-year-olds, and about that same number teaching the kindergarten age children. No figures are available to describe the number of people presently preparing to enter preschool teaching. However, it is safe to assert that the need for more teachers is rapidly approaching cataclysmic proportions.

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